United Nations

Daily Highlights

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ United States indicates it is developing, with other members of Security Council, resolution calling on States and organizations "to collect substantiated information" on "war crimes"; requests earliest possible convening of Commission on Human Rights in Geneva to discuss "dangerous deterioration" of human rights situation in former Yugoslavia.

+ Security Council demands that International Committee of the Red Cross and other relevant organizations be granted immediate access to locations in former Yugoslavia where civilians have reportedly been imprisoned and abused.

+ According to United Nations data update, world's urban population is growing more slowly than expected, with 1985-1990 growth rate down to 2.7 per cent per annum, from previous estimate of 3.1 per cent.

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The United States Government is developing, with other members of the Security Council, a resolution which would call on States and organizations "to collect substantiated information" concerning "war crimes" and make that information available to the Security Council.

In a press release issued today by the United States Mission to the United Nations, Acting Secretary of State, Lawrence S. Eagleburger, also indicated that, in light of an increasing number of reports over the past week showing the possibility of "executions, torture and other gross human rights abuses" and of "detention centers in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia", his Government was undertaking "renewed efforts to tighten sanctions enforcement....to ensure that the effect of the United Nations sanctions on the Serbian economy is as devastating as possible".

In a letter addressed earlier today to Antoine Blanca, Under Secretary General for Human Rights, the United States requested the convening of the Commission on Human Rights in an exceptional session "at the earliest possible date" in Geneva. Citing the "dangereous deterioration of the human rights situation in the former Yugoslavia, and great concern over "potentially

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massive human rights violations", the letter also indicated that there had been reports of "citizens being rounded up and summarly and arbitrarily executed", and "of villages being destroyed and homes demolished". Furthermore, the letter said, "international authorities have been hindered in their efforts to gain access to sites of alleged brutality".

Under these conditions, the United States Government believed "it was imperative" for the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to engage in high-level consideration of this situation.

A Spokeswoman for the Secretary-General told correspondents today that the 53 Commission members had until Monday, 10 August, to consider the request. In the event that the majority - 27 members - decided to respond favourably, an extraordinary session of the Commission could be called at the end of the following week.

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The Security Council last night demanded that the International Committee of the Red Cross and other relevant organizations be granted immediate, unimpeded and continuous access to locations in the former Yugoslavia where civilians have reportedly been imprisoned and abused.

Council President Li Daoyu (China) read out a statement on behalf of the members, in which they called upon all parties to do everything in their power to facilitate access to those places in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the other former Yugoslav republics which are reportedly being used as "camps, prisons and detention centres".

The Council reiterated the obligation of all parties under international humanitarian law and, in particular, under the 1949 Geneva Conventions. It also reaffirmed that "persons who commit or order the commission of grave breaches of the Conventions are individually responsible in respect of such breaches".

In a letter to the Council President dated 29 July, the Permanent Representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the United Nations listed 94 camps and prisons in Bosnia and Herzegovina and 11 in Serbia and Montenegro, which, the letter alleges, hold tens of thousands of Bosnian civilians. The letter also requested the Council to take all necessary steps to secure the safety of those interned and allow them to return home.

The list gives the approximate number of prisoners held and the number of those who were killed at each location. According to the letter, the information is based on data collected up to 26 July by various State organs and institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Among the places listed as locations for camps are such places as football stadiums and sports halls, barracks, school buildings, movie theatres and factories.

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New figures reported by the United Nations show that between 1985 and 1990 the world's urban population grew more slowly than expected, at a rate of 2.7 per cent per annum, as opposed to the 3.1 per cent rate previously estimated. Between 1990 and 1995 that rate is expected to decline further, to 2.6 per cent, though that still means there will be an additional 321 million urban dwellers.

Those data are part of the recently released 1992 revision of estimates and projections updated every two years by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Development (DESD).

Census data that has become available during the past two years contained a number of surprises, generally leading to a downward adjustment of the United Nations urban population estimates. The 1990 estimate of the share of the world's population living in urban areas was lowered slightly, from 45 per cent to 43 per cent, yielding the 2.7 per cent growth rate. Correspondingly, the urban growth rate estimate for the less developed regions was lowered from 4.5 per cent in 1985-1990 to 3.8 per cent.

Of particular importance in this revision is China, which currently comprises 22 per cent of the world's population. Analysis of its 1990 census showed 79 million fewer urban dwellers than earlier projected. New data or analyses also led the United Nations to significantly reduce its estimates of urbanization for a number of African countries, for example, Somalia (from 36 per cent to 24 per cent), Zaire (from 39 per cent to 28 per cent) and South Africa (from 59 per cent to 49 per cent).

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